

**PEER INFLUENCE AND STUDENTS' BELIEF ABOUT THE VALUES OF PROSE
LITERATURE AS PREDICTORS OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN PROSE
LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH IN IBADAN METROPOLIS**

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Abstract

The importance of prose literature to the students' academic and moral lives is numerous. However, the rate at which students fail this subject at the school certificate level calls for urgent attention. This has led scholars to determine the influence of many teacher factors on students' achievement but not many have focused on students' factors especially in prose literature hence this study. The study adopted the descriptive research design of the correlational type. 223 SSIII students of Literature-in-English from six purposively selected secondary schools in Ibadan metropolis were respondents in this study. Prose Literature-in-English Achievement Test ($r = 0.83$), Students' Peer Influence Questionnaire on Prose Literature-in-English ($r = 0.84$) and Questionnaire on Students' Beliefs about the Values of Prose Literature-in-English ($r = 0.83$) were instruments used to collect data and data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. There was no significant relationship between peer influence ($\beta = -.082, P > .05$), students' belief ($\beta = -.050, P > .05$) and students' achievement in prose literature. The two variables jointly explained 7% of the total variance of students' achievement in prose literature. The relative contribution revealed that none of the variables was significant, peer influence ($\beta = -.073, P > .05$) and students' belief ($\beta = -.021, P > .05$). Therefore, the findings cannot predict which of the variables has the highest or the lowest contribution. Based on this, it is concluded that since none of the variables was significant, some other variables could be identified for students' underachievement in prose literature in Ibadan metropolis.

Keywords: Prose literature, peer influence, students' belief, students' achievement.

Although Literature-in-English is one of the subjects in the school curriculum, the value it adds to life is beyond being an ordinary school subject. Literature-in-English encompasses every aspect of human life. It is therefore not surprising when one of its definitions asserts it mirrors life. This is because it reveals everything that has to do with humans in the manner in which they live. According to Owoeye, (2003), Literature helps to enlarge our awareness of life.

It objectively touches every aspect of life. Literature-in-English promotes and protects our cultural heritage. Through Literature-in-English, the reader imbibes the correct types of values and attitudes expected to make him or her function as a worthy, responsible and credible member of a society as explained in Section 1, subsection 7 of the 2004 National Policy on Education.

The benefits of Literature are indeed numerous but it seems most of the students do not know or appreciate the values embedded in this subject. If they had recognized these benefits, the rate at which they fail the subject would have been reduced to the minimum level. This means, the students' performance in Literature-in-English is poor. The evidence of their poor performance can be confirmed from the WAEC results below:

Table 1.1: Performance of Literature-in-English students in May/June WASSCE from 2002 to 2013

YEAR	TOTAL ENTRY	TOTAL SAT	NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OBTAINING GRADE		
			GRADE A1-C6	GRADE D7-E8	GRADE F9
2007	381425	357511	133122 37.23%	130103 36.39%	82114 22.96%
2008	406165	384129	160664 41.83%	140620 36.61%	72818 18.96%
2009	421848	401890	160788 40.01%	154547 38.46%	61811 15.38%
2010	399095	376134	138948 36.94%	145176 38.60%	75488 20.07%
2011	462266	440295	184224 41.84%	180301 40.95%	73140 16.61%
2012	504343	481888	194542 40.37%	153139 31.77%	114509 23.76%
2013	510829	493392	98426 19.94%	199653 40.46%	175503 35.57%

Source: Research Library, Aptitude Test Development Division. The West African Examinations Council Headquarters office Onipanu, Lagos.

The results from the table above show that students' performance in Literature-in-English between 2007 and 2013 is not encouraging. This is because, less than 50% of the candidates had credit in the subject. This means that the percentage of students that could probably use the result to gain admission into higher institutions of learning within these years would not be up to 50%. If the failure persists, our nation is at the risk of having shortage of students studying Law, Mass Communication, Journalism, English language, Theatre Arts and even English Education. This is because the admission requirement for these courses is at least a credit pass in Literature-in-English.

Literature-in-English as a literary work is of three genres: poetry, drama and prose. The focus of this study is mainly on the prose genre of Literature-in-English. Prose is the narration of story with straight forward language, either in speech or written. It originates from the word 'prosa' meaning 'straightforward' (Chun, 2014). It uses the language of everyday conversation: language of newspaper, mass communication, news and official purposes. The language of prose always communicates effectively with the reader or audience.

According to Chun (2014), prose comprises of complete grammatical sentences, which constitutes paragraphs. It is always very easy to understand the message conveyed in prose because it is not as complicated as poetry, where language can be abstract or esoteric. Prose is a type of writing that is not poetic (Ibitola, 2005). Prose Literature-in-English has its own independent but conscious way of writing that differs from conforming to any literary patterns or rules. Adegoke (2005) defines prose as a division of literature in which characters are given life-like characteristics but it is not performed on stage. Prose literature is not meant to be performed on the stage like drama. It is more of reading and understanding. Omojuyigbe (2005) says prose is straightforward and its message is usually conveyed in clear and direct expressions. Prose does not confuse its reader with the way it is written and the way it uses language, it expresses its message in a simple and direct language. Prose does not have a specialized pattern of composition but the conventional method of writing essay. This is supported by Fakeye (2012) who says prose is always written in plain and easily comprehensible language. Prose is like a spoken or written language as in ordinary usage, distinguished from poetry by its lack of metrical structure. Prose has nothing to do with measurement of lines like poetry.

Peer Influence and Students' Belief about the Values of Prose Literature as Predictors of Students' Achievement in Prose Literature-In-English in Ibadan Metropolis

The poor knowledge of the values of prose literature has contributed to some of the problems we have in Nigeria today, for example, culture conflict, ethno-religious crisis and mutual distrust.

If prose literature has been used as a tool of mono-intercultural competence, these problems would not have probably arisen. Reading of novels and short stories will take one round the world, knowing beyond where one is. It makes one a complete human being who does not discriminate against anybody.

Poor performance of the students in Literature-in-English, as revealed in the result above, is the concern of this study. One of the contributing factors to this poor performance is that the students do not perform well in the prose genre of Literature-in-English. The West African Examinations Council's (WAEC) Chief Examiners' Report of May/June 2015 on prose literature also supported the fact that students' performance in this particular genre is not encouraging. The report reveals the weaknesses of the students that contributed to their poor performance as: misinterpretation of questions, violation of instructions, indecipherable handwriting, writing of irrelevancies and failure to express answers in good English. Also, the reports of the WAEC Chief Examiner from 2007-2010 repeatedly revealed that the failure to read the prescribed text by the students is one major factor responsible for their consistent poor performance in prose literature and Literature-in-English at large.

In addressing the problem of poor performance in prose literature, lots of studies have been carried out by researchers but most of them centred on teaching strategies that can make the teaching of Prose Literature-in-English effective. Among these studies are Gafar 2012, (Effects of explicit teaching of multiple reading comprehension instruction strategies on students' achievement in prose literature-in-English), Akinsulire 2012, (Effects of Narrative text structure awareness of student's achievement in Prose Literature), Yinusa 2012, (Two modes of reading comprehension instructional strategies and students achievement in prose literature in English). Other studies on Prose Literature-in-English are from: Ibidapo 2014, (The effect of scaffolding instruction on students' achievement in prose literature) Paul 2014, (Teacher' Characteristics and students' Achievement in selected Prose fiction). Researchers also focus on students' related factors like: students' knowledge of selected prose literary terms, (Oladepo 2012) and students' attitude to prose fiction, (Olaniyan 2014). Despite the contributions of these studies, the academic performance of students in prose literature and Literature-in-English at large is still not encouraging. The implication of this is that, some other variables that are yet to be considered could be responsible for the students' poor performance in prose literature and Literature-in-English. Two of such variables are: peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature.

Peer influence is the pressure mounted on the child/student by his/her pressure group. Peer group refers to the people of the same age grade, doing things together and in common. Studies have shown that, influence from peer group could be sometimes stronger than that of the parents, when there is a need to make decisions (Arnett, 2010, Akhtar and Aziz, 2011). Castrogiovanni (2002) defines peer group as a small group of similar age, fairly close friends sharing the same activities. For them to have and do something in common, they will possibly have influence either directly or indirectly on one another's academic performance. Most students worry about their peers' reaction to certain steps or actions they take. There is therefore every possibility that these same students could be influenced towards their performance in prose literature. This is supported by Burn and Darling (2002) who say that peer influence is an act of changing one's behaviour to meet the perceived expectations of others. These others expectations could be such as being studious or having lackadaisical attitude towards academics. Paul, Lisa and Venesa (2006) are of the opinion that peer-tutoring often result in academic, emotional and social gains for the students involved. Therefore, the kind of student a Literature student associates with has the tendency of predicting his/her academic achievement in prose Literature-in-English.

Studies have shown that peer influence is strongly related to students' achievement in Mathematics, Economics, Computer Science, French, History, Chinese, English, Yoruba and Literature (Khodadady and Zabetipour, 2013; Boucher, Bramouille, Djebbari and Fortin, 2012; Akhta and Aziz, 2011, Carman and Zhang, 2012; Alabi, 2013 and Adeoye, 2014). However, to the best of the

knowledge of the researchers, the extent to which this factor could predict students' achievement in prose literature in Ibadan metropolis has not been determined.

Belief is what a person thinks about a phenomenon. In this study, students' belief is what the students think about the values of prose literature. It is what they think prose literature and Literature-in-English as a subject can offer. The value a student places on a subject will determine how much effort will be put into the learning of that subject. This can be supported by Schommer, 1994, who says belief is discovered to have influence on students' processes and outcomes of learning. Students' beliefs about a particular subject or aspect of a subject like Literature-in-English or Prose in Literature-in-English could determine their academic performance in that subject or an aspect of that subject. Sometimes, students may believe that novels are voluminous and difficult to understand, even though they have not read more than one text. This belief may discourage them from being interested in reading the prescribed novels and can directly or indirectly affect their academic performance in prose literature.

Studies have established relationship between students' belief about different school subjects and their achievement. Fakeye (2013) examined students' belief about English language. Obinali (2015) examined students' belief about Mathematics, Adebiyi, (2012) studied students' belief about English language.

However, to the best of the knowledge of the researchers, the extent to which this factor could predict students' achievement in prose literature in Ibadan metropolis has not been determined. This research work therefore investigates how the influence of peers and students' belief about the values of prose literature could predict students' achievement in prose literature.

Statement of the Problem

Literature-in-English is an important subject in the senior secondary school curriculum, especially its three genres; drama, poetry and prose. However, reports from schools revealed that students are not doing well in the subject and this has been traced to their poor achievement in prose literature. Efforts to address this problem have led scholars to work on: teaching style, text difficulty, text unavailability, among others. Despite these interventions, the performance of students in prose literature has not satisfactorily improved, thereby fueling suspicion that other factors could be responsible. Among such factors are: peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature. Studies have shown that these variables predict strongly towards students' achievement in Mathematics, English language, Economics, Computer Science, Chinese and French. However, to the best of the knowledge of the researchers, the extent to which these variables could predict students' achievement in prose literature has not been focused especially among Literature-in-English students in Ibadan metropolis. Therefore, this study investigates peer influence and students belief about the values of prose literature as predictors of students' achievement in prose Literature-in-English.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised for this study:

1. What is the relationship between peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature and their achievement in prose literature?
2. What is the composite contribution of peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature to their achievement in prose literature?
3. What is the relative contribution of peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature to their achievement in prose literature?
4. Which of the variables (peer influence and students' belief) would predict students' achievement in prose literature?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because its findings would revealed the extent to which peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature predict students' achievement in prose literature. This could then provide solution to students' problem of underachievement in prose

literature in particular and also in Literature-in-English. It would also shed light on areas of professional development needs of literature teachers who are in constant search of improved performance in literature. The implication of this is that whenever there is going to be any workshop for literature teachers, issues like peer influence and students' belief would be addressed for improvement in students' performance. This study would also lead to the achievement of the objective for which prose literature is inculcated in the curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

Attribution theory underpinned this study. The theory was first proposed by Heider (1958) and was further developed by Weiner (1986). Attribution theorists assume to determine the reason why people do what they do, that is, the theorists attribute causes to human behaviour. The theorists stress the relationship between *effort* and *academic achievement*. It is argued from the theory that the outcome of individuals' behavior can be determined by both external attributions and internal attributions

The external attribution is looking at the cause of events by external forces like; families, friends, teachers and so on. Li Johnson, Cohen, Williams, Knowles, and Chen, (2012) described the external attributions as those factors that individuals are unable to control While the internal is looking at the cause of event from the side of the person or persons involved. Elliott, Hufton, Willis and Illushiin (2005) posited that both internal attributions and external attributions play a role in affecting individuals' subsequent behavior

Attribution theory provides a strong foundation for this study in that the study attempts to investigate the extent to which internal attributions (students' belief about the values of Literature) and external attribution (peer influence) would predict students' achievement in prose Literature-in-English.

Research Design

This study adopted the descriptive research design of the correlational type.

Population

The population for this study consists of all SSIII students of Literature-in-English in public senior secondary schools in Ibadan metropolis. Six senior secondary schools were purposively selected from the schools in Ibadan metropolis using the following criteria:

1. The schools that have SSIII students of Literature-in-English who have read the selected text for this study.
2. The schools in which the principals and teachers were willing to participate in the study
3. The schools that had presented students for Literature-in-English examinations at WAEC and NECO at least for five years.

A total number of 223 students participated in this study.

Research Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data in this study. Two questionnaires for the students titled 'Students' Peer Influence Questionnaire on Prose Literature-in-English (SPIQPLE) and Questionnaire on Students' Belief about the Values of Prose Literature-in-English (QSBVPLE)'. The questionnaires were self-designed and consisted of 20 items each, structured along modified four-point Likert-Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD). Positively worded items were scored along the scale of 4, 3, 2, 1 for SA, A, D and SD respectively while the scores were reversed for negatively worded items 1, 2, 3, 4. The Achievement test was titled 'Prose Literature-in-English Achievement Test (PLEAT)'. It was designed to measure students' performance in prose literature. It had two sections (A and B) which covered questions from two novels which the students had been taught out of the four prescribed novels for WAEC and NECO syllabus for 2015 to 2020. The novels include one African novel and one non-African novel. Section

A: Questions from *Lonely Days* by Bayo Adebowale (African novel) and Section B: Questions from *Native Son* by Richard Wright (Non-African novel).

Validation of Instruments

The face and content validity of the instruments were determined by showing them to Literature-in-English teachers and language education experts, the corrections made by them were factored into the production of the final draft. The reliability of the instruments was determined through test-retest reliability method using Cronbach Alpha. The index of the peer influence questionnaire was 0.83, that of students' belief was 0.84 while that of the achievement test was 0.83

Procedure for Administration of the Instruments

The researchers were permitted by the selected schools' authority to carry out the research under the supervision of the subject teachers. The instruments were administered to the students, one after the other. The researchers explained to the students what they were expected to do. The students wrote the test and filled the questionnaire. The administration of data for the study lasted six (6) weeks.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency percentage, mean, standard deviation and inferential statistic of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression Analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

The results of the study are presented based on the research questions.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature and their achievement in prose literature?

Table: 4.1: Correlation Matrix showing the Relationships between Peer Influence, Students' Belief about the Values of Prose Literature and their Achievement in Prose Literature

	Mean	S.D.	R	P	Remark
Students' Achievement	18.8206	13.5837	1		
Peer Influence	44.8520	6.1322	-.082	.224	N. S.
Students' Belief	52.4350	5.9762	-.050	.453	N.S.

**Correlation Significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

Table 4.1 above shows that there was no significant relationship between, Students' Achievement in prose literature and peer influence ($r = -.082, P > .05$), and no significant relationship between Students' Achievement in Prose Literature and Students' Belief ($r = -.050, P > .05$).

Research Question 2: What is the composite contribution of peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature to their achievement in prose literature?

Table: 4.2: Composite Contribution of Peer Influence and Students' Belief about the Values of Prose Literature to their Achievement in prose Literature

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate			
.084	.007	-.002	13.5971			
A N O V A						
Model	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	288.721	2	144.361	.781	.459	N.S.
Residual	40674.104	220	184.882			
Total	40962.825	222				

**significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 4.2 shows that the joint or composite effect of peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature on students' achievement in prose literature was not significant. The table also shows a coefficient of multiple correlation ($R = .084$ and a multiple R^2 of $.007$). This means that 7% of the variance was accounted for by the predictor variables when taken together. The significance of the composite contribution was tested at $P < .05$. The table also shows that the analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the regression yielded an F-ratio of $.781$ (significant at 0.05 level). This implies that the joint contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable was not significant.

Research Question 3: What is the relative contribution of peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature to their achievement in prose literature?

Table: 4.3: Relative Contributions of Peer Influence and Students' Belief about the Values of Prose Literature to their Achievement in Prose Literature

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Stand. Coefficient	T	Sig.	Remark
	B	Std. Error	Beta Contribution			
(Constant)	28.592	8.893		3.215	.002	
Peer Influence	-.162	.163	-.073	-.999	.319	N.S.
Students' Belief	-4.739E-02	.167	-.021	-.284	.777	N.S.

Table 4.3 reveals the relative contributions of the independent variables to the dependent variable, expressed as beta weights, viz:

Peer Influence ($\beta = -.073$, $P > .05$), no significant relationship exist;

Students' Belief ($\beta = -.021$, $P > .05$), no significant relationship exist.

Research Question 4: Which of the variables (peer influence and students' belief) would predict students' achievement in prose literature?

Results from Table 4.3 above reveal the relative contributions of the independent variables, viz: Peer Influence with a beta weight of $\beta = -.073$ and Students' Belief of beta weight ($\beta = -.021$) did not contribute positively to Students' achievement in prose literature in the study. This means none of the variables could predict students' achievement in prose literature.

Discussion of Results

The study investigated how peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature could predict students' achievement in prose literature in Ibadan metropolis.

The result of the study showed that there was no significant relationship between peer influence and students' achievement in prose literature. This negates the findings of Bankole and Ogunsakin (2015) and Khodadady and Zapetipour (2013) who believed according to their studies that there is significant relationship between peer influence and students' academic achievement. The result also revealed that there was no significant relationship between students' belief and students' achievement in prose literature. It is therefore inconsistent with the view of Fakeye (2013) and Chemers, Hu and Garcia (2001) whose study revealed that there is significant relationship between students' belief and academic achievement, though the relationship may be weak, strong, negative or positive.

It was also revealed that there was no significant composite effect of peer influence and students' belief on students' achievement in prose literature. This means when the two variables are taken together, they did not have any effect on the students' achievement in prose literature. It then means they cannot improve students' achievement. The study is inconsistent with the view of Akhta and Aziz (2011) whose study revealed that there is significant relationship between peer influence and students' academic achievement. It also negates the view of Adebisi (2012) who believed that there is relationship between students' belief and academic achievement.

The findings of the study also stated that neither peer influence nor students' belief was significant. This implies that none of the two variables contributed to students' achievement in prose literature. This result is consistent with the findings of Alabi (2013) whose study revealed that there is no significant relationship between peer influence and students' academic achievement.

The result finally showed that peer influence and students' belief did not contribute to students' achievement in prose literature. This implies that none of the two variables could predict students' achievement in prose literature. This finding did not conform to the findings of Tope (2011) and Burke and Sass (2011) who believed that peer influence could predict students' academic achievement.

Conclusion

It was found from the findings of this study that the two variables (peer influence and students' belief about the values of prose literature) were not good predictors of achievement in prose literature. It could be concluded from this study that some other stronger and more related variables might be responsible for students' underachievement in prose literature and Literature-in-English in Ibadan metropolis. Therefore, such variables should be focused on in subsequent studies in order to help the students overcome the problem of poor achievement in prose literature and Literature-in-English. This study has however provided a justification for the need to shift research focus to other variables that can influence students' achievement in prose literature.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Students should be sensitized on the importance and the values of prose literature in order to improve their commitment and attitude to prose literature, Literature-in-English and achievement in them.
2. Parents and guardians who are really after their wards' achievement in prose fiction and Literature-in-English should strive to get them all the required novels and encourage them to read.
3. English teachers should ensure they teach their students new vocabulary at every class so that the vocabulary in the novels they read will not discourage them from reading and thereby denying them of the benefit they would have enjoyed in reading them.
4. Literature-in-English teachers should ensure that their students have read the prescribed novels before giving them any explanatory note on them. This is because, giving them note when they

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have not read the text will discourage them from reading the text and thereby having shallow knowledge of the text.

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